

Plymouth, Duxbury fans fight to save Bug Light

PLYMOUTH — Bug Light, a beacon for mariners since 1871, will be scrapped this summer and replaced by a modern fiberglass tower, unless outraged fans of the landmark have their way.

A fledgling campaign to save the light materialized as soon as it became known the Coast Guard plans to tear it down. The Plymouth selectmen want their congressman to intervene, Duxbury residents are circulating a petition, and it's even rumored a businessman wants to buy the lighthouse.

"That's kind of an abomination, what they've got planned there," said Selectman David Tarantino. "It looks awful."

Tarantino was referring to a photograph of the new white fiberglass light tower installed off Deer Island in Boston Harbor. The same light is planned as the replacement for Bug Light, except that it would be brown.

Bug Light is known officially as the Duxbury Pier Lighthouse. Its distinctive shape is responsible for the nickname. Midway between Saquish Head and the tip of Plymouth Beach, the light marks the entrance to Plymouth Bay with a red flash every five seconds.

Coast Guard spokesman Richard



Photo courtesy H. Blanchard

Bug Light

Griggs says the 33-foot cast iron tower is badly rusted and would cost too much to repair and maintain. He said the state has determined the light is not historic, in part because its spark plug shape is common on the New England coast.

"We like lighthouses as much as the next guy," Griggs said. "We don't like to see them done away with, especial-

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ly if there is any historical significance. The Duxbury Pier Light doesn't qualify for the National Historic Register."

According to Griggs, the new light will cost \$63,000. He said it would take at least that much money to make minor repairs to Bug Light, \$200,000 more for structural work that's needed and another \$200,000 to restore it to mint condition.

The selectmen voted Tuesday to ask Rep. Gerry Studds and Sen. Edward Kennedy to look into the controversy.

Supporters of the old light are running out of time. The Coast Guard plans to begin dismantling it in three to five weeks.

Edwin Heap of Duxbury, whose Seabury Point home looks out on the light, is collecting signatures of residents opposed to the Coast Guard's plan. He has 80 names so far.

"They shouldn't do it," Heap said. "I don't think it's good to tear down something that old."

Heap thinks the old light should be left in place, even if it has outlived its usefulness. "Why not just put the new one near it?" he asked.

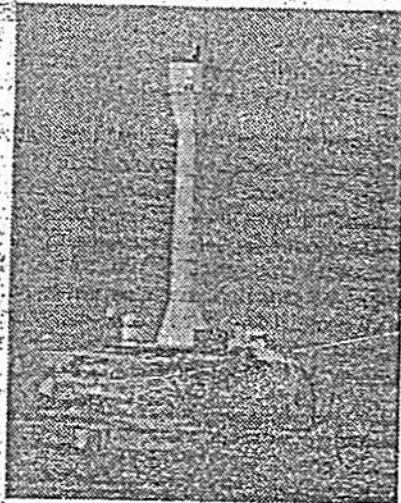
Plymouth resident Richard Bramhall has sailed out past the light dozens of times. He thinks the proposed tower is ugly, and wonders why the government can't afford to spare the old light.

"How much did they spend today on the MX missile?" he asked.

Bramhall and several other residents said they have heard a local businessman is offering to buy the light. They don't know whether the rumor is true, but they want to believe it.

George Davis, owner of Plymouth Marina, said he knew of no plans to buy the light. Davis, whose father Frank A. Davis was keeper of the light during World War I, said he doubted the light could be bought because it could not be moved.

"The navigation aid is in the tower,



Deer Island Light in Boston Harbor. A similar tower in a different color is planned for Plymouth Bay.

It works well, it can be seen by people coming into the harbor. It has a fog signal that is heard. It is what everyone looks at when they are coming in the harbor. I would prefer it left there," Davis said.

Griggs said the Coast Guard has received at least 12 letters on the issue in the past two weeks. He said it's not too late to save the light.

"I guess the decision could be changed at any time," he said. "The money required to replace it hasn't been spent yet."

The Coast Guard appreciates aesthetics, Griggs said, but it must also consider economics. "Sometimes you have to go for the most practical method of doing business. That's what we're faced with here. Nobody built a lighthouse because it would look nice out on the point."

The Coast Guard has gone to fiberglass because it is comparatively light and requires little maintenance. Only two fiberglass lighthouses have been built so far, one in Boston and the other in the Great Lakes.